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A W O R D

OF

FRIENDLY REPROOF, &c.



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FRIENDLY REPROOF, &c.

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[ 1844 ]

A  
W O R D *k*  
OF  
FRIENDLY REPROOF  
AND  
INSTRUCTION

To those who *seldom* go to Church.

BY A COUNTRY CLERGYMAN:

For the Use of his Parishioners.

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THE SECOND EDITION,  
ENLARGED WITH  
A POSTSCRIPT, addressed to Persons of Rank  
and Property.

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You say you hope to be saved ; and you profess yourself a member of the church of England.

I earnestly beseech you, then, as you value that hope and profession, to read the following pages with serious attention ; and, if you are at the head of a family, to prevail upon your children and servants to hear them read over, if it be but once.

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L O N D O N :

Printed for J. WHISTON, in Fleet-street, and E. and  
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MDCCLXXI.





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A W O R D  
OF  
FRIENDLY REPROOF, &c.

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DEARLY BELOVED,

ON reckoning up the number of families among you who profess themselves members of the church of England, and comparing them with those who usually attend its public service; the very great disproportion strikes me with concern.

Public worship is so evidently both of divine and human institution, that you cannot be a good Subject, any more than a Christian, while you continue to attend it but seldom; for, while you are setting the laws of heaven at defiance, you are treating the laws of your country with the same contempt. But I address you as a

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minister,

minister, not as a magistrate; and therefore only drop this hint by the bye.

I shall now lay before you some passages from the Scriptures, which, take but candour and attention to consider them, will clearly convince you of the strong obligations you are under, of a constant attendance upon public worship.

You may read in the Old Testament, and particularly in the books of Deuteronomy <sup>a</sup> and Joshua <sup>b</sup>, how punctually all the congregation of Israel attended upon the public reading of the law. The women and the little ones heard all the law from the mouths of Moses and Joshua, and after their decease from persons duly appointed to read it. In the more advanced age of the church, when David was king over Israel, public worship was held in the same high repute. Observe how feelingly David speaks of having gone with the multitude to the house of God:

“ <sup>c</sup> Like as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God: my soul is athirst for God, yea even for the living God: when shall I come to appear before the presence of God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they daily say unto me,

<sup>a</sup> Deut. xxix. 10. xxxi. 11, 12.

<sup>b</sup> Josh. viii. 34, 35.

<sup>c</sup> Psal. xlii. 5.

Where is now thy God? Now, when I think thereupon, I pour out my heart by myself; for I went with the multitude, and brought them forth into the house of God, in the voice of praise and thanksgiving, among such as keep holy-day."

Hear too part of the 48th Psalm; where, under the name of Sion, you are to understand the chief place of God's public worship. "Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised, in the city of our God, even upon his holy hill; the hill of Sion is a fair place, and the joy of the whole earth." And again, "We wait for thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple." In the 84th Psalm, the sacred penman expresses his desire to go up unto the house of the Lord with such warmth, that, unless your heart is cold indeed, you must feel it in some degree yourself.

"O how amiable are thy dwellings, O Lord of hosts! my soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found her an house, and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young; even thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my

<sup>a</sup> Psal. xlviii. 2.

<sup>e</sup> Psal. lxxx. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11.

God! Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be always praising thee: they will go from strength to strength; and unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Sion. One day in thy courts is better than a thousand: I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness."

The 95th Psalm, which we always read in the morning service, is sweetly adapted to public worship: "O come let us sing unto the Lord, let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation; let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and shew ourselves glad in him with psalms: for the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. O come let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our maker."

From all these passages we may plainly conclude, that divine blessings are principally to be expected in the assemblings at God's house: that the feet of the thankful delight to tread the courts thereof; and that he has no spiritual affection, any more than gratitude, glowing in his breast, who cannot heartily take up his word, and say, "I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the house of the Lord!"

Before



Before I finish the references to the Old Testament worship, let me request of you to read over the sixth chapter of the second book of Chronicles, containing Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple. No doubt but you have heard of Solomon's temple, its grandeur and magnificence; yet the worship there celebrated, yea, though assisted with all that vast grandeur, was not to be compared with the worship which you usually neglect; for if the preaching of the law, and the setting forth of its types and ceremonies, was glorious; how much rather does the Christian worship, and the preaching of Christ (to whom the law with the types and ceremonies pointed) exceed in glory! And if a Jew was inexcusable for not attending the ordinances of the law; what must become of you, professing yourself a Christian, for generally neglecting the ordinances of the Gospel?

Your guilt appears strong, from what has been already observed from the Old Testament; but it will be seen much stronger, upon considering the institutions of Christ in the New. For, to say nothing of your folly in depriving yourselves of the particular blessing which is promised "where two or three are gathered together



together in the name of Christ <sup>f</sup>," his appointment of a settled regular succession of ministers, till his coming a second time to judge the world, determines your guilt as clearly as every thing else that can be urged. The appointment of ministers (not to mention other parts of their office) implies the gathering together of hearers; and as there is no hearing without preaching, so there can be no occasion for preaching without hearing. The very mention of the duty on our side, sets the guilt of neglect in duty on yours in the strongest light. Suppose a minister careless and indifferent to the religious concerns of the people committed to his charge—you perceive the sinfulness of such a character, without my referring you to those portions of scripture which denounce wo upon unfaithful shepherds. But think you that the people who are careless and negligent in their attendance upon the minister can be guiltless? Did you ever consider how Jesus Christ resents the conduct of those who neglect his ministers, that is, (at least in one sense of the word) who neglect to hear them? You may see in the tenth chapter of Luke, verse 16, "He that heareth you, heareth

<sup>f</sup> Matth. xviii. 20.

me ; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me ; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me." This passage is very applicable on the present occasion : for are not we, the ministers of the Gospel, in the place of those disciples to whom our Lord speaks ? Do we not preach to you in the name of Jesus Christ, and as put in authority by him ? " He that heareth you, heareth me, says our Lord ; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me."

" Oh ! but (say you) I do not mean to despise Christ, by not coming to church so often as I should." This may not be your express intention : nevertheless, the guilt of that great sin lies at your door as often as you are absent from public worship without a real cause. What is *despising*, in the verse above, but not hearing ; or, in other words, what is *despising*, but thinking so meanly of our preaching, or so highly of some other object, as to be detained by that object from due attendance upon the Gospel ordinances ?

As long as we preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, you are bound to give diligent heed to our preaching : and if you treat any part of our office with slight and contempt, as you may be said to do in an especial manner by not coming to hear us—Know this for a truth,

and tremble at the thought of continuing in the practice, Christ takes the affront as offered to God the Father and Himself. “ He that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.”

Let me farther stir you up to due attendance upon public worship, by suggesting to you that preaching is a channel through which it pleases God to convey spiritual blessings, and, I am inclined to add, in an especial manner. The apostle Paul’s assertion, that “ faith cometh by hearing<sup>a</sup>,” had undoubtedly its immediate accomplishment with respect to those who had not yet enjoyed the opportunity of reading the word of God; among whom, therefore, preaching was the only channel of conveying divine knowledge. Yet it seems to have held good very frequently since that opportunity has been general; for most of the worthies, whose pious names are upon record, have ascribed the rise and progress of religious impressions very principally to the hearing of the word preached. And it is observable, that those people (whether higher or lower, richer or poorer, the observation is equally just) who make light of hearing, are commonly the most destitute of the fear of God, and all other religious impressions.

<sup>a</sup> Rom. x. 17.

Several of you cannot read ; and have hardly any opportunity of hearing the word of God, but from the minister : and dare you trifle with the opportunity ?

Some plead, that if they remain ignorant of duty, they shall not be punished for leaving it undone—but let this undeniable maxim sink deep into the ears of all such self-deceivers, “ that men are always answerable for the omission of duties which they had an opportunity of knowing ; and that wilful ignorance is direct and studied disobedience.”

Others can read, and pretend to know their duty as well as the minister can teach them (as if hearing a sermon was the whole of coming to church, where prayer and praise form the greater part of the service) : but I will not scruple to affirm, that such persons, however they may know their duty, are evidently by this very neglect, far, very far, from practising it, and consequently stand in need of being reminded thereof by the minister as much as any who come to hear him.

They are apt to say too, that they can read the Scriptures at home ; but I doubt whether those who have no heart to come to church, have any more to read the Scriptures at home ; I mean with sincerity and humility—for I ask—



and appeal to common sense for the answer—can you be sincerely and humbly searching the will of God in the Bible, while you are living in the habitual neglect of attending public worship, which is a duty as clear from Scripture as though it was found written there in so many words, “Go constantly with reverence to the place appointed for public worship.”

It is my intention to shew you that you are in general inexcusable for not coming regularly to church; and therefore I shall consider the usual reasons given for staying away, and expose the deceitfulness of such of them as deserve it.

“You are sick, and cannot come; or you  
“are waiting upon those that are, or upon  
“young children, neither of which class of persons should be left alone.” Sickness is a real hindrance; and attendance upon others under such circumstances, or helpless children, is the mercy which undoubtedly takes place of sacrifice; but, as you have an immortal soul, which must be nourished and served as well as your body, suffer me to ask (it being a case of great importance) whether you are not sometimes more indulgent to your bodily complaints, and more fearful of getting harm by coming to church, than need be? and whether you could  
not



not contrive to be assistant one to another, in taking care by turns of your children during the hours of public worship? Where inclination is wanting to a duty, we are all of us too soon furnished with excuses for not fulfilling it.

But what shall we say to the more common excuses, the weakness of which immediately appears upon being held up to the light of God's word? Such as the following:—"That you  
 " have not been at church so long, that you  
 " should be *particular* were you to be seen there  
 " now, and are therefore ashamed to go;"—  
 or, " that you are so meanly clothed, that  
 " your neighbours would laugh at you, or  
 " frown upon you;"—or, " that you are as  
 " good as several that do attend, who are no  
 " better for it; and that therefore you may as  
 " well stay away."

As to the first excuse—if you have kept away from church *so long*, just so long have you been a despiser of God's ordinances: and which is best, continuing in this sin, or breaking it off by making one of the congregation next Lord's-day?

As to mean clothing, if, through calamities of any kind, or the demands of a large family, you have no other to put on; take my advice: Go to church; let him who dares, laugh or

frown——God's face will be against that man in return, when his calamity cometh: he must want the bowels of a man, much more of a Christian, who can make sport of your poverty. And farther let me tell you; your shame is of a false sort. Providence (in a sense) has clothed you as you are clothed: and ought you to be ashamed of his appointment? But if through extravagance you are thus reduced, or because when you had money you would in some shape or other add fuel to the flame of your lusts; take shame to yourself, as the just consequence of your folly. You are guilty of bringing yourself into such circumstances as will not permit you to appear upon an equal footing with your neighbours. Nevertheless, I would advise you to go up to church, and to own your folly to any who seem to remark you; and, by an ingenuous confession of it, you may probably obtain that charitable assistance, which otherwise would not have been called out into exercise. As to the last excuse, "That you are as good as several that do attend, who are no better for it, and that therefore you may as well stay away:" it is so inconsistent a method of reasoning, that you will laugh at it yourselves, if applied on any other occasion. "Some people take food; but it passes through them undigested, and without  
affording

affording proper nourishment ; others therefore will eat no food at all :” or, “ some followed our Lord when he was upon earth ; but it appeared by their conduct, that they only followed him for the loaves and fishes ; others therefore refused to follow him at all.” How do you like the reasoning in these two instances ? is it not inconsistent in the highest degree ?

But you act upon it, as often as you keep from church because several who go there are no better for going, and because you are as good as you think them to be.

But this excuse is in one respect worse than any other ; for it is a sign of much censoriousness and uncharitableness. What have you to do with other people ? Your business is, to make your own calling and election sure. They are answerable for abusing the means of grace ; and you are left without excuse for neglecting them. Again, if you suppose that you are to be saved because you are as good as some, and better than others, of your neighbours, you are yet strangers to the first principles of Christianity—you are yet utterly ignorant of the scheme of salvation laid down in the Bible, to which I heartily refer you, to know “ what you must do to be saved,” and not to the delusive standard of other peoples characters.

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There are others, who have no kind of excuse for not coming, or coming so *seldom*; but, being led away by their lusts to public houses, places of entertainment, or detained elsewhere by unseasonable visits, are heaping upon themselves indignation, from the gracious, but despised Institutor of public ordinances.

I omit insisting upon the complicated guilt of neglecting them, both as it includes the breaking of the Sabbath, and the setting a bad example; which, if you are at the head of a family, may have the worst consequences: for all which, you are in a great measure answerable. I have not insisted upon the danger of that fatal ignorance which must remain in the understandings of those who, destitute of the helps of a good education, know, and ordinarily can know, but little of religious truths, but what they learn from their ministers. As to the stale pretence of not being able to get ready in time for church, on account of business; take care that you have to plead *necessary business*, in the faithful acceptance of the words: for it is not to be called necessary, if it could have been done on Saturday, or might be deferred till Monday. Breaking in upon Sunday mornings, by late returns from marketing, or traffick of any sort; or breaking in, upon the same account, on any part of the Sunday

day afternoon, is nine times in ten the fact, with those who prefer the temple of Mammon before the temple of the living God.

I will conclude what I have to offer upon this head, with this solemn warning: You may deceive your minister; you may deceive yourselves: but you cannot deceive the Searcher of hearts. Look well to it, therefore, that your excuse for not coming to church be such as you need not blush to offer before the judgment-seat of God. This consideration may serve as a general touchstone, to prove *every sort* of excuse that can be urged; an answer to all of which, arising from a variety of circumstances according to the difference of station in life, cannot be expected to appear in the compass of this tract.

I am thoroughly aware, that multitudes attend church regularly, without attaining the end. I am sorry to have reason also to add, that the reliance upon forms and mere attendance is the general mistake of the age and day in which we live. Notwithstanding all this, I am bound to maintain it as a truth; that, though a person professing Christianity may attend church as punctually as the bell tolls, and not be a Christian at last; it is impossible that *he* should be a Christian, who, being a professed member of our church, frequently (without just cause)



cause) neglects it. To such an one alone I humbly offer this word of friendly reproof and instruction ; it being far from my design to reflect on the conscientious dissenter, of any denomination.

Thus have I plainly shewn the guilty state of those who neglect attendance upon publick worship. The number of the guilty protects me from the charge of aiming at any particular persons in what I have advanced.

I address you in print, because the houses where I propose to have this left are too many to admit of it in writing, which moreover you would few of you make out so readily. I might have applied to you personally from house to house ; but it would have been long before I could have found you so easily as this will, and longer still before an opportunity would have presented itself of entering so fully upon the subject.

Besides, the business of the conversation would probably die with the sound of my voice. It is possible indeed for you to pay as transient a regard to this paper, as to a conversation upon the same subject : but this method of application entirely strips you of every plea. You might forget, or pretend to forget, arguments once urged : but you cannot pretend to forget any  
argument

argument contained herein ; for this remains with you. I pray God, it may not witness against you : but, however that may be, my conscience is now entirely cleared ; and your blood, if you persevere in your neglect, is upon yourselves.

If this should fall into the hands of any sincere Christians ; let them join their prayers with mine, that it may be blessed to those for whose use it was honestly intended, by their affectionate minister,

&c. &c.

### P O S T S C R I P T.

THE Author, finding that the above has been favourably received by several of stations superior to those for whom it was first designed, and having it much upon his heart to improve an opportunity of usefulness, takes the liberty of addressing a few lines more immediately to such readers.

Besides the general reasons urged for constant attendance upon public worship, a special one presents itself to you—"The influence of example in persons of property and rank." Did

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the

the principal families of a parish seriously consider this, surely they could not persist in neglecting public worship, without the severest strokes of conscience. Where divine service is performed twice a day, I know it is frequently deemed sufficient to attend once; and I have heard it argued, that where there is double service, it is appointed only for the sake of a number of persons of inferior condition, some of whom can only attend in the morning, and others in the afternoon. Undoubtedly such persons are to avail themselves of the advantages which by this appointment they enjoy: but can this excuse come with grace from the mouths of any but those who are (during one of the services) employed in necessary business on the Lord's day? It is true, there are some who are thus necessarily employed; and permit me to ask, ought not gratitude towards Him who has made you to differ from such persons, to have a better effect upon you? But there are others, who do not pretend to apologize for themselves after this manner; who are detained from church by a variety of reasons, most of which they would be ashamed to avow and defend. One, however, seems to deserve notice, being very commonly given, and that is this—"The hours of dinner and afternoon service interfere." You would,



would, perhaps, be offended in a high degree, if I was, on this occasion, to refer you to a people of old, “ whose end was destruction, whose god was their belly<sup>a</sup>.” But at least I may humbly submit to your future consideration, whether family blessings can be expected, while family hours are so inconsistent with duty to God? I can easily suppose some to reply, “ that they would alter the hour for themselves, but that their company would not like it.” How justly may it be observed, that one sin draws on another!—Is Sunday a proper day for visits of ceremony or courtesy? Public houses are, by the laws of the land, forbidden to entertain guests during the times of divine service: and are not company entertained in private houses at those hours equally offending against the scope and spirit of those laws? But, farther, can you deliberately send invitations for that day, which reduce you to the necessity of offending Him, whose bounteous hand spreads your table with plenty, that and every day in the week? It is not improbable but some may see, and be ready to confess, the indefensibleness of their behaviour; but dread of a charge of particularity, and of ridicule on that account, may restrain them from altering their conduct.

<sup>a</sup> Phil. iii. 19.

Believe me, Sirs! the state of this Christian country (on this occasion improperly so termed) is truly lamentable, where, by your own confession, to be punctual but in the observance of the Lord's own day is to be particular. All I can do is, to quote to you a plain and applicable portion of Scripture, taken from our Lord's own mouth; " Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels <sup>b</sup>."

What has now been said may, I hope, be made instrumental in convincing persons of all conditions of the duty of habitual attendance upon public worship; the neglect of which is so common a sin, that though it cannot but unavoidably find many guilty, I humbly pray that it may not leave them so, but that it may be the means of leading them to repentance; and if but one or two shall have cause to be thankful that these lines came in their way, I shall think my time and attention in writing them happily employed.

<sup>b</sup> Mark xviii. 38.



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